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C O N F I D E N T I A L ANKARA 000054

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT ALSO FOR EUR/SE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/13/2020

TAGS: PREL BU TU

SUBJECT: MFA EYES "ANTI-TURKISH SENTIMENT" IN BULGARIA

REF: A. SOFIA 23  
¶B. ANKARA 1717

Classified By: POL Counselor Daniel O'Grady for reasons 1.4(b,d)

¶11. (C) SUMMARY: The MFA told us January 8 "anti-Turkish sentiment" in Bulgaria was a cause for concern in otherwise good relations between the governments of Turkey and Bulgaria. This anti-Turkish stance, it said, was one of the factors leading to Minister Dimitrov's demanding compensation from Turkey for Bulgarians who migrated from Turkey after 1913. Bulgarian PM Borisov's slow rebuke of Dimitrov (two days later) could be explained by Borisov's waiting to see others' reactions or simply his lack of political experience, according to the MFA. The foreign ministers of Turkey and Bulgaria will likely discuss this issue when they meet January 16 on the margins of Istanbul's 2010 European Capital of Culture activities. END SUMMARY.

Anti-Turkish Sentiment

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¶12. (C) In a January 8 meeting, MFA Second Secretary Semra Demirer stressed the good relations between Turkey and Bulgaria's ruling party, Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria (GERB). She did note rising anti-Turkish sentiment which targeted the ethnic Turks in Bulgaria (who make up 10 percent of the population). On December 15, GERB joined forces with National Union Attack (Ataka), an ultra-nationalist party growing in popularity, on a referendum to ban a ten-minute news bulletin in Turkish on Bulgarian National Television's daily news. PM Borisov later withdrew his support. According to Demirer, PM Borisov spoke with PM Erdogan by phone twice in December 2009 to explain himself, claiming he "fell into a trap." Demirer intimated Borisov courted the ultra-nationalists for political support but got cold feet when he saw negative reactions.

¶13. (C) Demirer speculated that Bojidar Dimitrov, Minister of the Agency for Bulgarians Abroad, was motivated by his personal anti-Turkish feelings when on January 5 he demanded compensation from Turkey for Bulgarians who lost property when they migrated from Turkey after 1913. Demirer downplayed Dimitrov's demand as merely a personal statement and noted PM Borisov's censure of Dimitrov on January 7. In a separate meeting on January 8, the Bulgarian Embassy's Zornitsa Apostolova also downplayed Dimitrov's demands as the personal statements of a former academic without any

political experience who has a penchant for making off the cuff comments.

PM Borisov's Slow Response

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¶4. (C) Demirer suggested PM Borisov may have responded slowly to Dimitrov because he was waiting to gauge public and international opinion on the matter. Demirer told us this delayed response (as well as his change of heart on the Ataka referendum) could also be explained by PM Borisov's and GERB's lack of political experience. (Note: GERB came into power in July 2009. End Note.)

¶5. (C) The MFA's Demirer and the Bulgarian embassy's Apostolova both focused on the positive aspects of Turkish-Bulgarian relations. They both gave special attention to the joint commission which was designed as a problem-solving mechanism between the two countries. Apostolova said the property issue (compensations) was not the main issue but simply one among a package of issues being discussed by the joint commission's working groups. (Note: The four issues are the property issue, Black Sea issues, radio frequencies, and construction/infrastructure. End Note.) Demirer told us the FMs of both countries will be meeting, at Bulgaria's request, on the margins of Istanbul's 2010 European Capital of Culture activities on January 16.

¶6. (C) COMMENT: Turkey-Bulgaria relations may provide a good example of how FM Davutoglu's glowing vision of the Ottoman Empire era (REF B) is not shared by others in the region. We leave it to our Embassy Sofia colleagues to gauge the extent

of any historical animosity, but Ankara will find it worrisome to see anti-Turkish sentiment rising to the level of the 1990s. For now, PM Borisov's quick action seems to have restored calm.

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